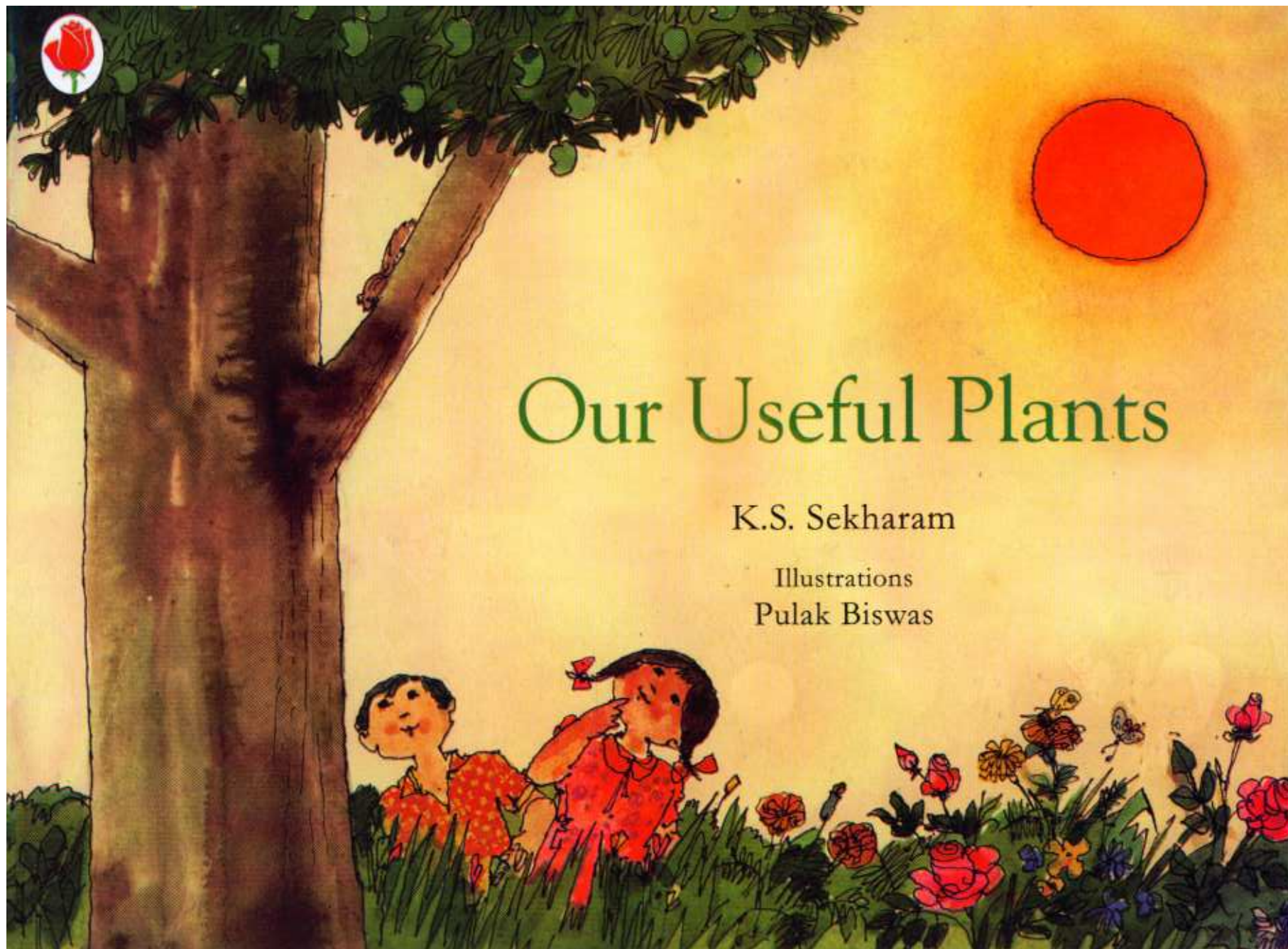




Our Useful Plants

K.S. Sekharam

Illustrations
Pulak Biswas





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*Original Telugu
Illustrations*

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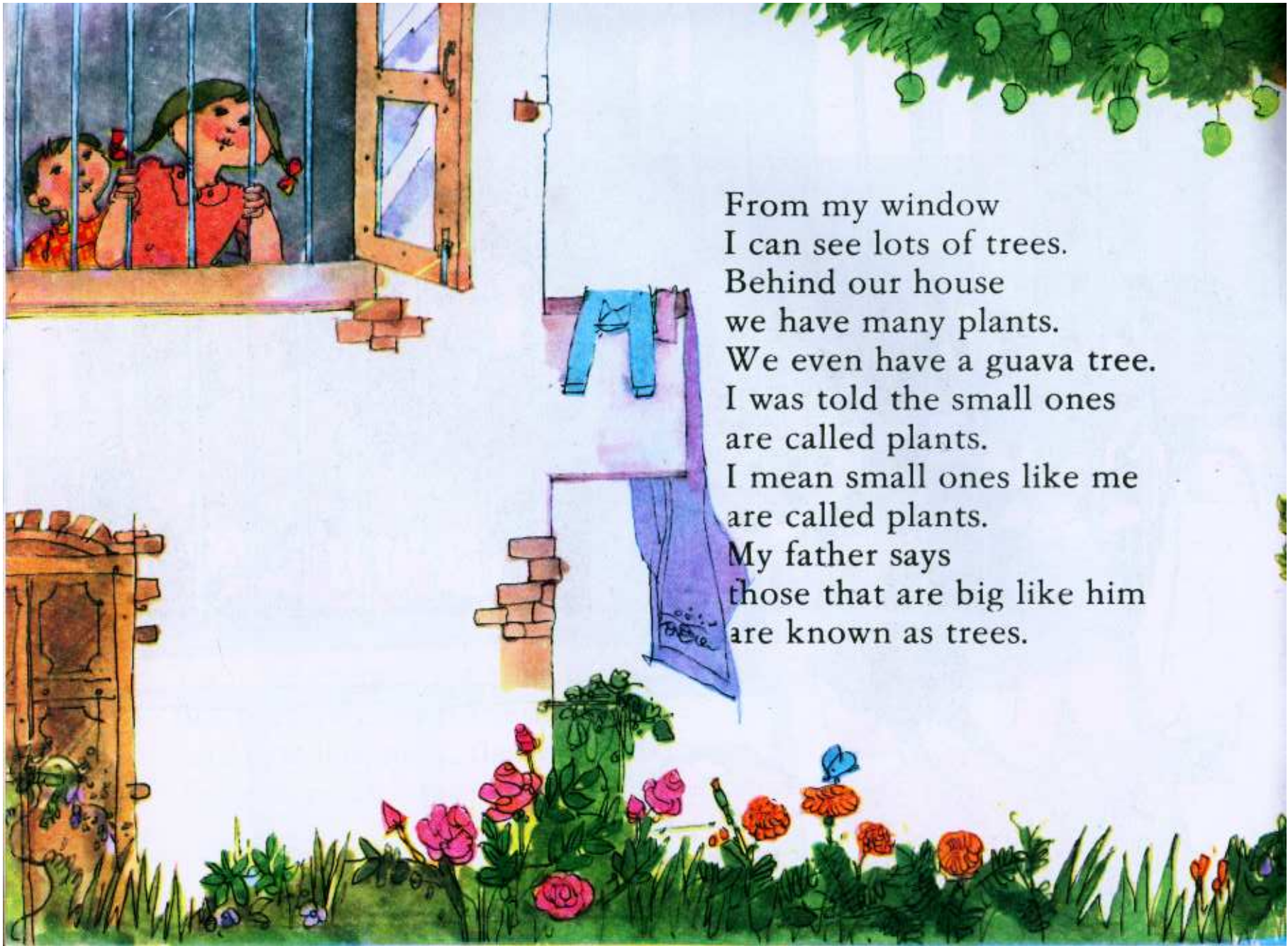
This is our family
Mother, Father, little brother,
Tommy and I.



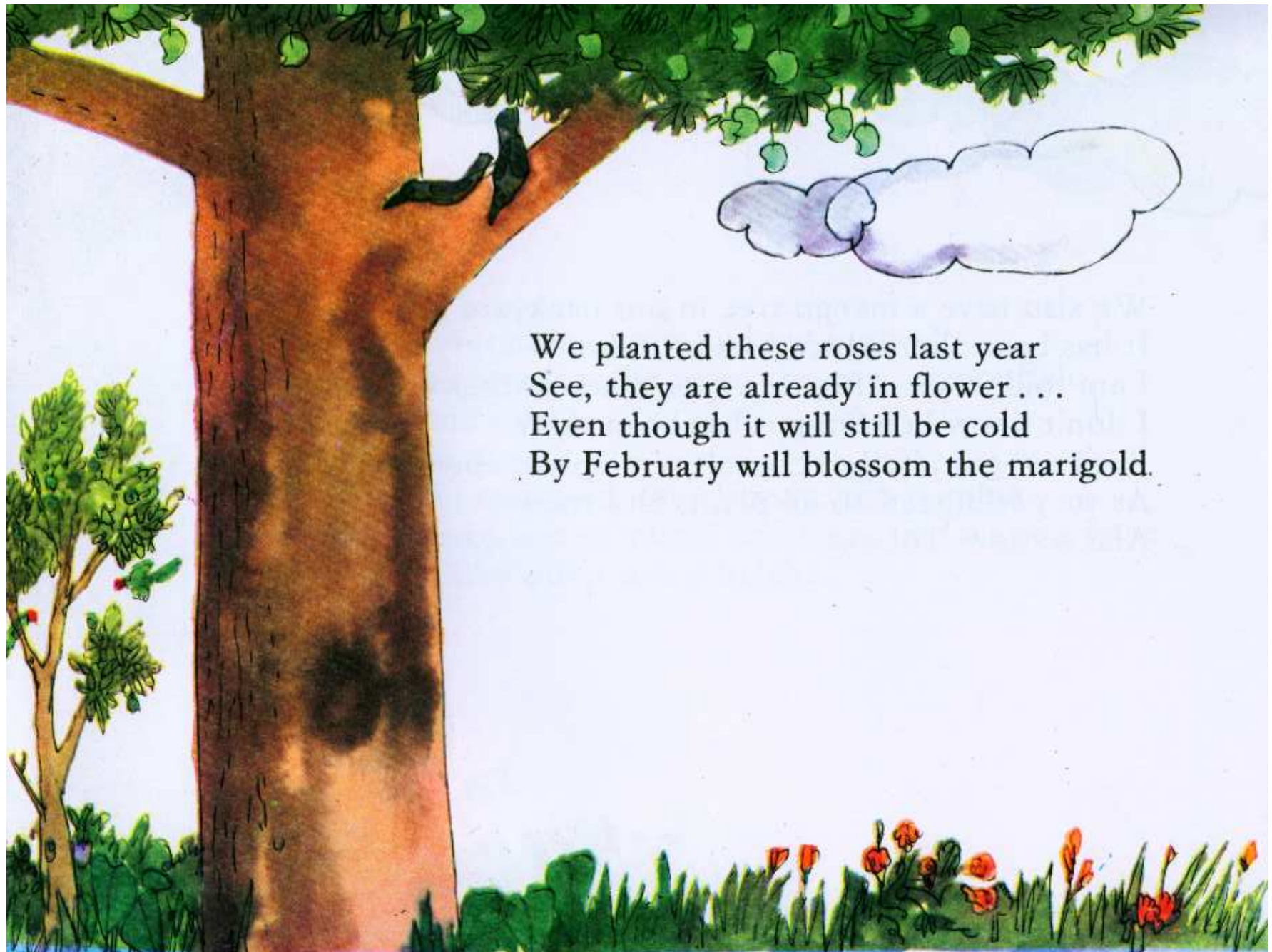


You remember our visit to the zoo the other day?
We met Tommy's friends
And saw leopards, tigers, monkeys, zebras
They were all looking out of their windows.

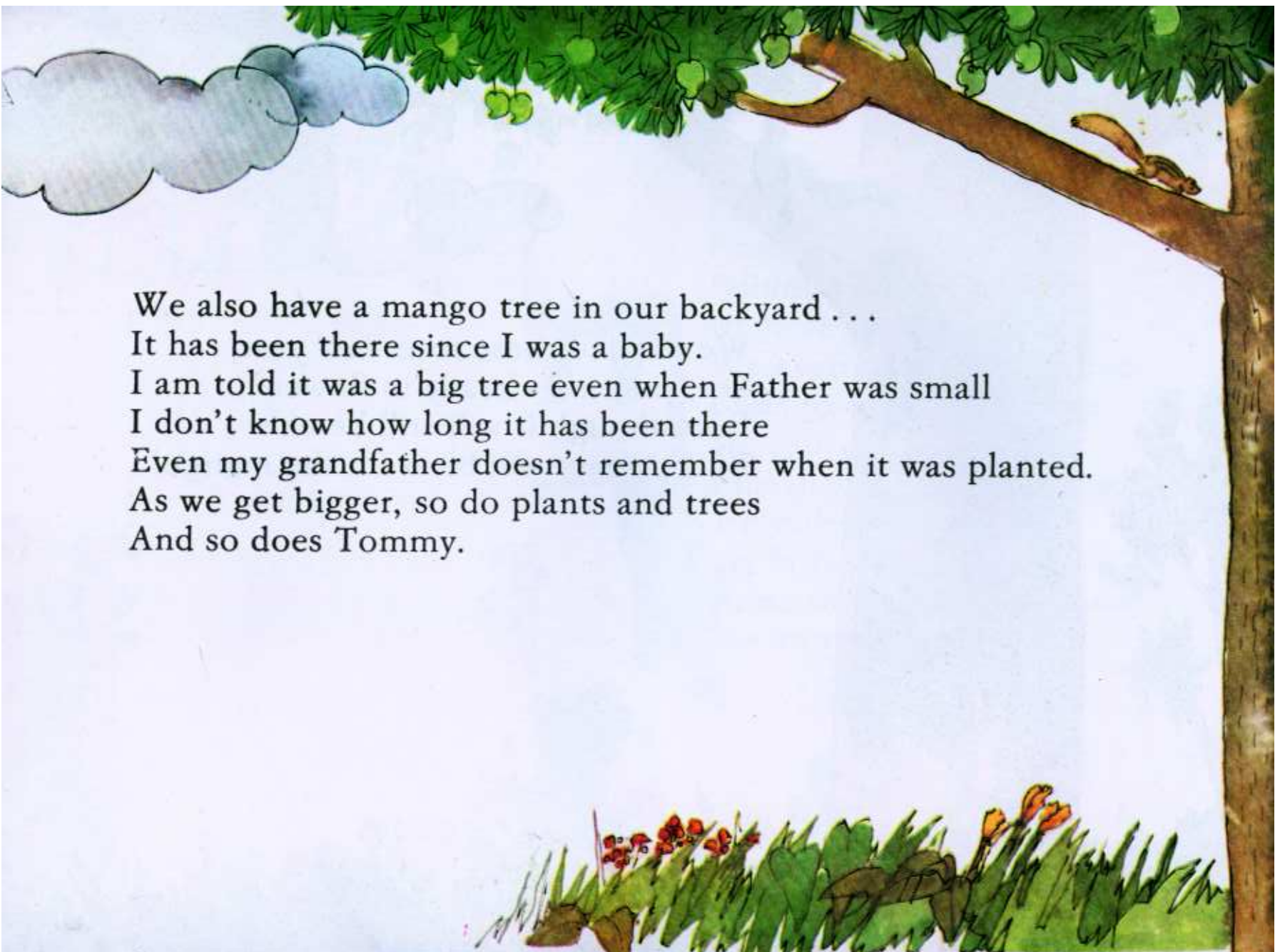




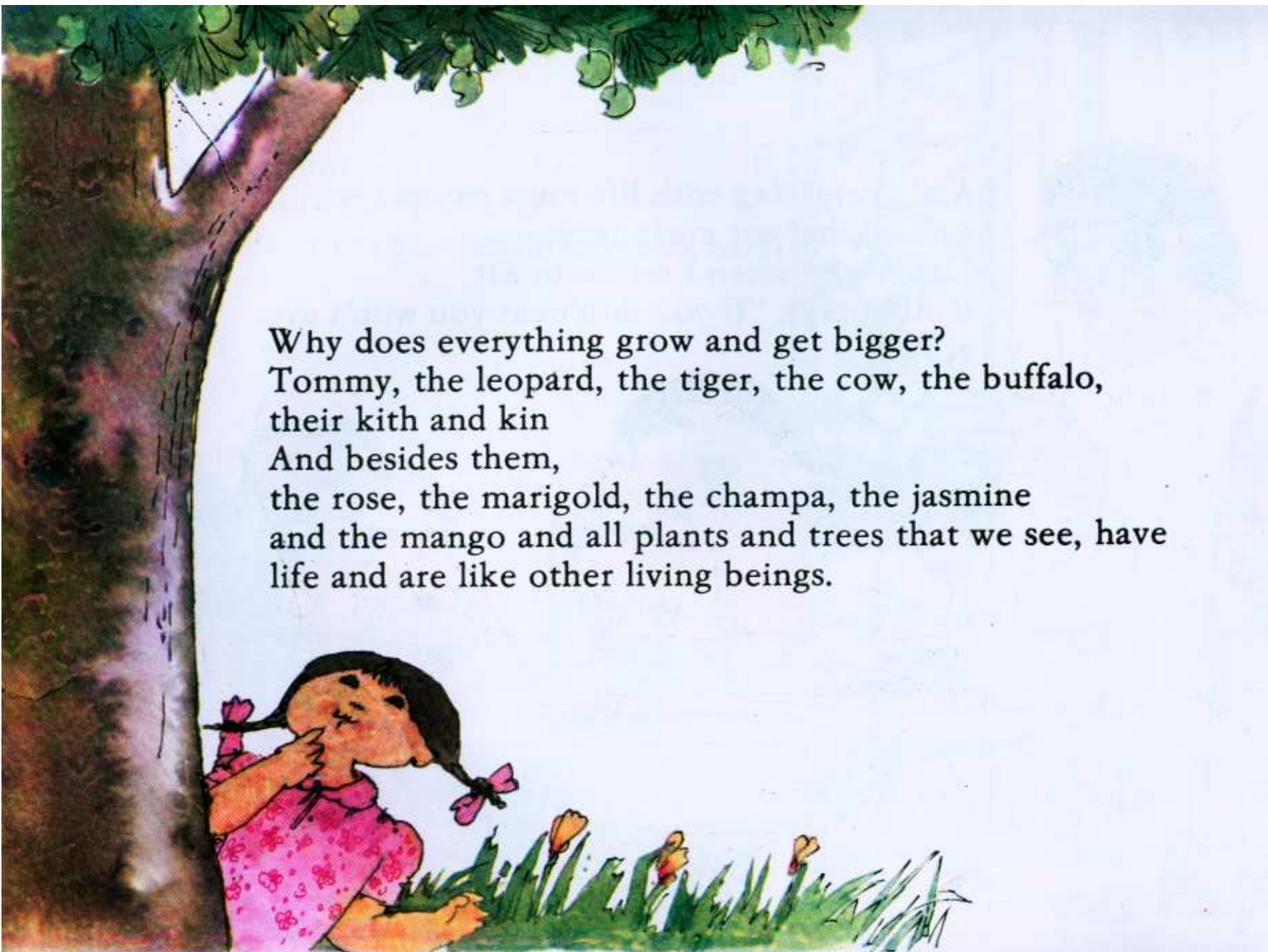
From my window
I can see lots of trees.
Behind our house
we have many plants.
We even have a guava tree.
I was told the small ones
are called plants.
I mean small ones like me
are called plants.
My father says
those that are big like him
are known as trees.



We planted these roses last year
See, they are already in flower . . .
Even though it will still be cold
By February will blossom the marigold.

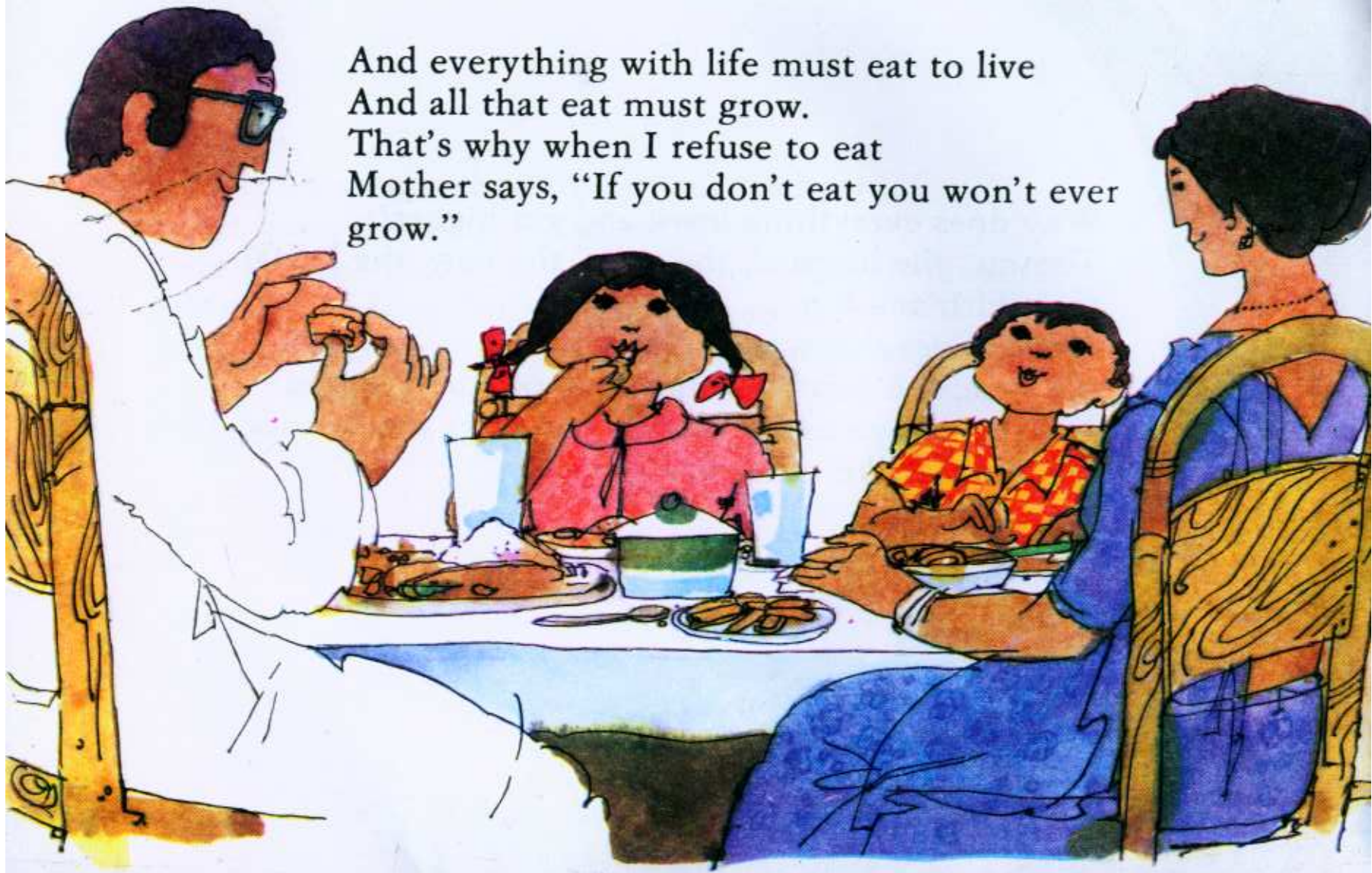


We also have a mango tree in our backyard . . .
It has been there since I was a baby.
I am told it was a big tree even when Father was small
I don't know how long it has been there
Even my grandfather doesn't remember when it was planted.
As we get bigger, so do plants and trees
And so does Tommy.

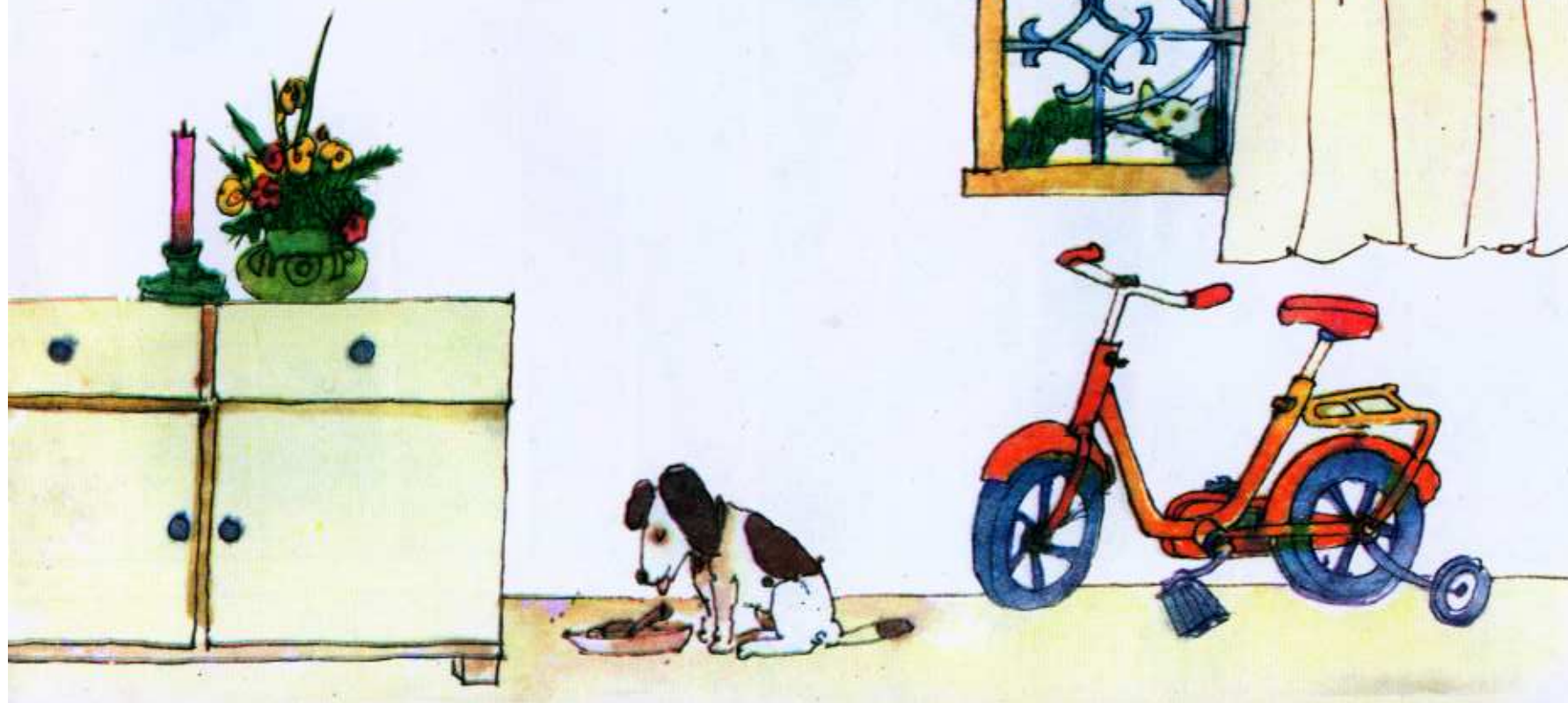
A watercolor illustration of a young girl with dark hair in pigtails, wearing a pink dress with a floral pattern. She is standing next to a large, dark brown tree trunk, with her hand on her chin in a thinking pose. The background is a light blue sky. In the foreground, there are green grass blades and several yellow-orange flowers. The text is written in a simple, black, serif font, centered in the upper half of the page.

Why does everything grow and get bigger?
Tommy, the leopard, the tiger, the cow, the buffalo,
their kith and kin
And besides them,
the rose, the marigold, the champa, the jasmine
and the mango and all plants and trees that we see, have
life and are like other living beings.

And everything with life must eat to live
And all that eat must grow.
That's why when I refuse to eat
Mother says, "If you don't eat you won't ever
grow."



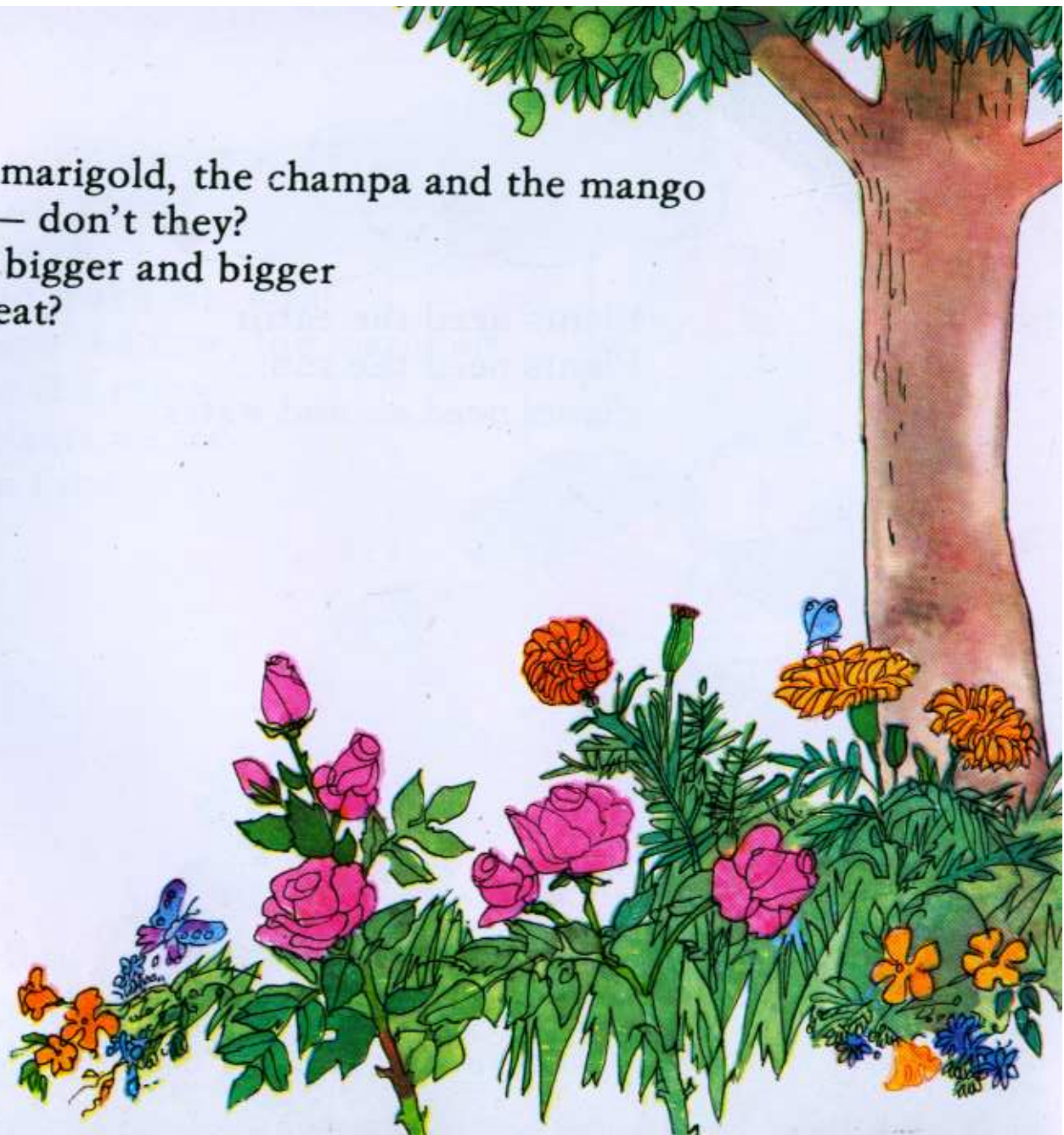
All of us-eat
So does Tommy
And when no one's looking
the cat laps milk (the thrashings she's had!)

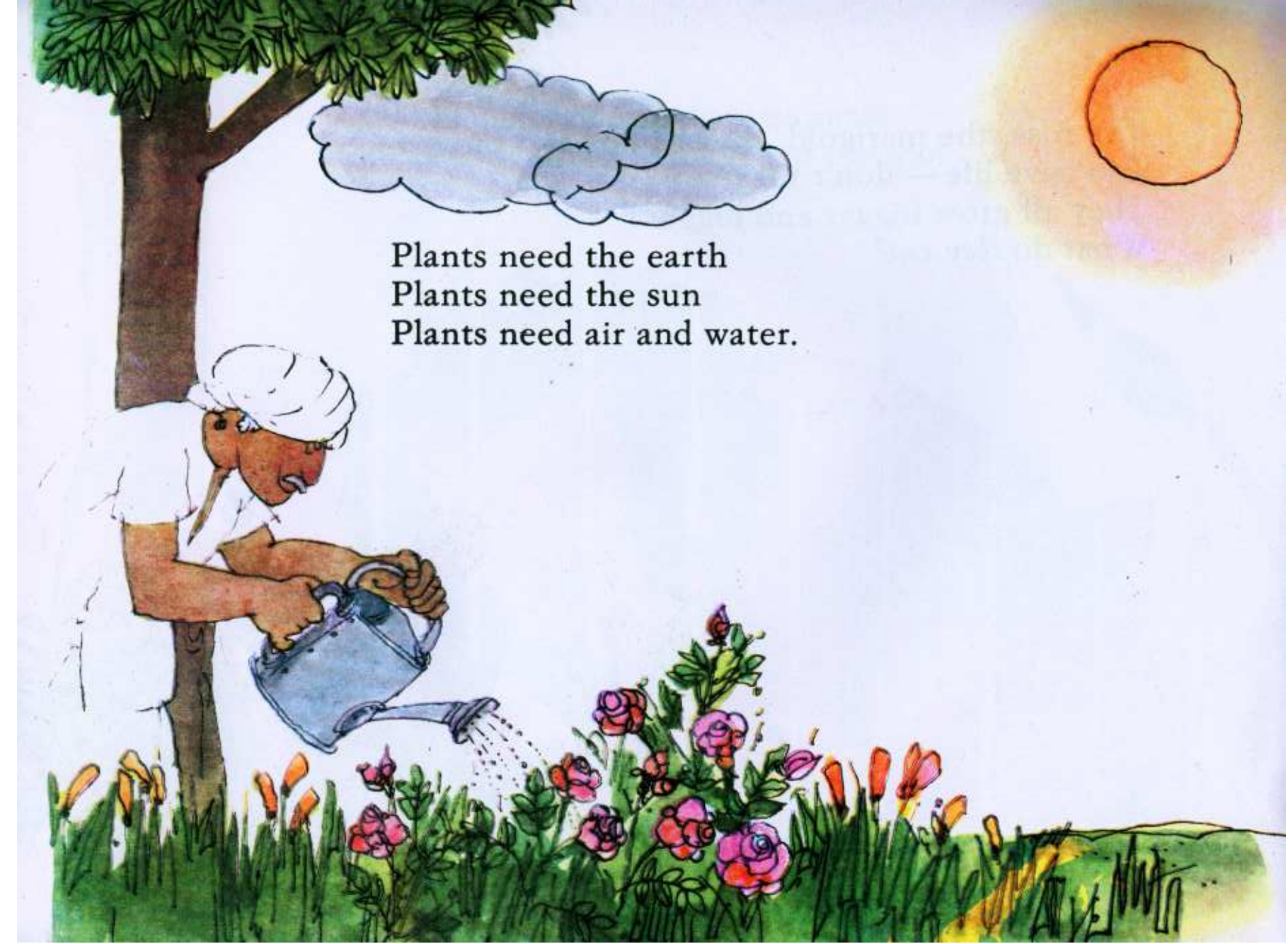


The lion and the tiger eat meat
(we saw them being fed at the zoo).



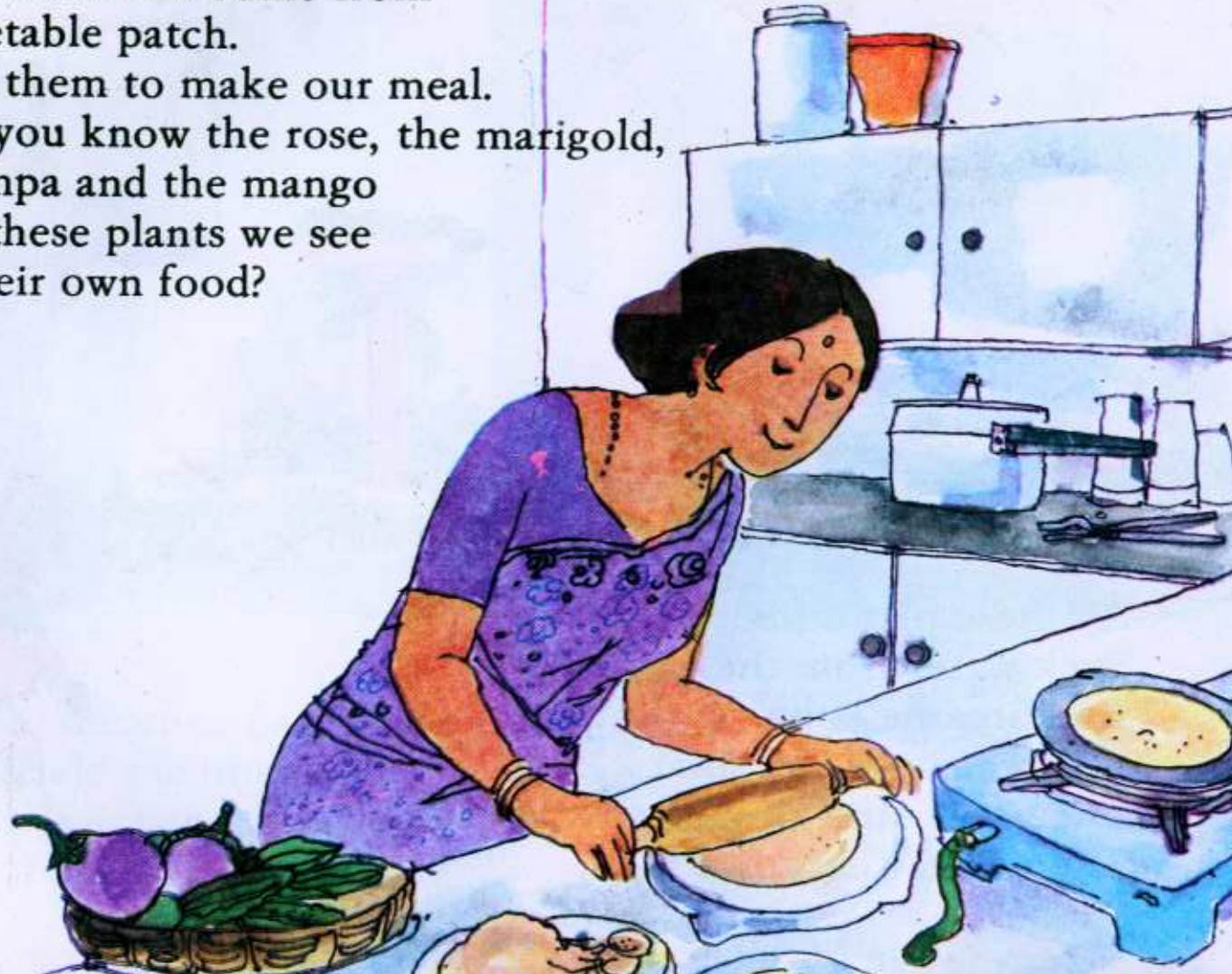
The rose, the marigold, the champa and the mango
also have life — don't they?
They all grow bigger and bigger
What do *they* eat?

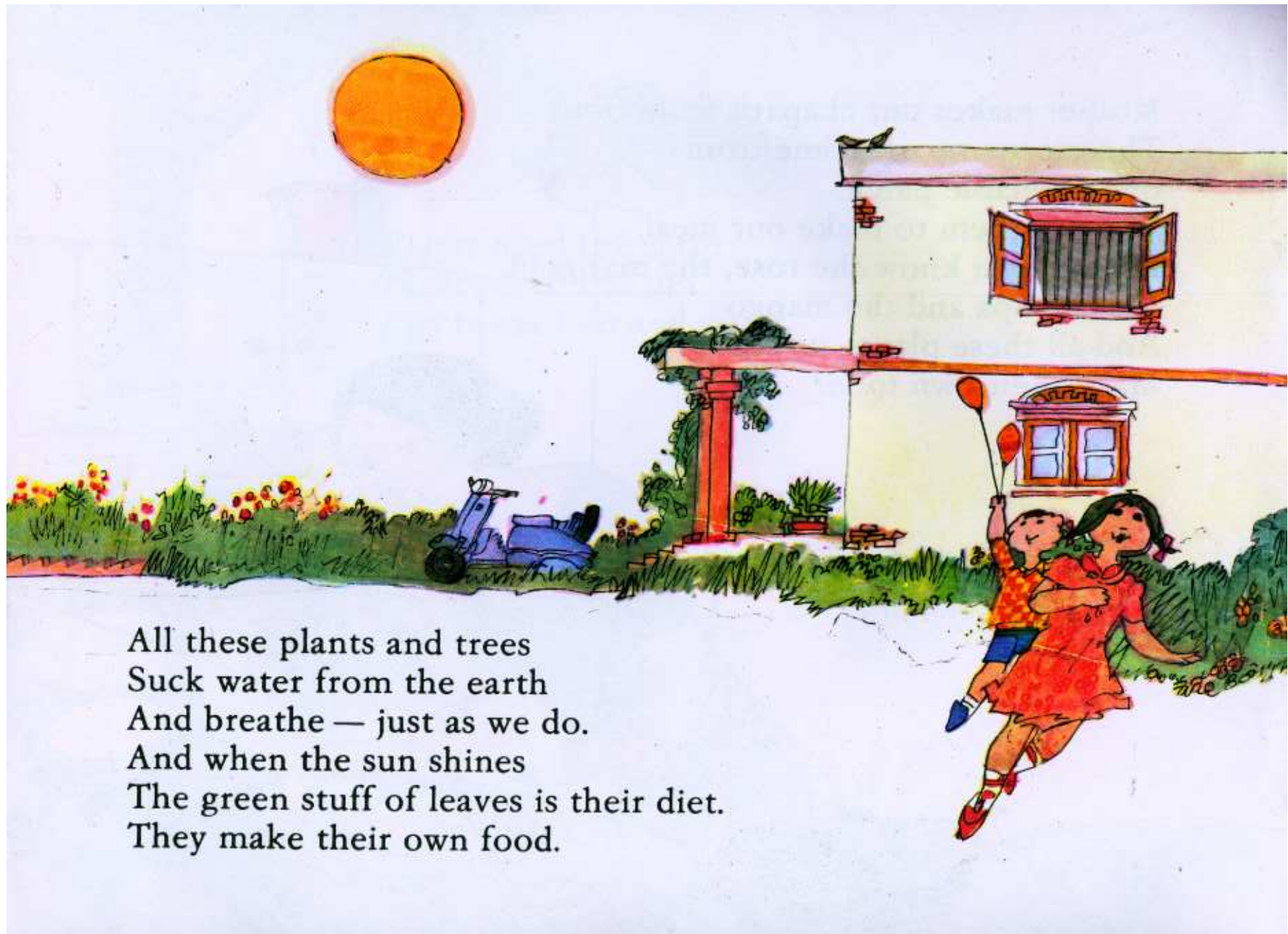




Plants need the earth
Plants need the sun
Plants need air and water.

Mother makes our chapatis from flour
The greens we eat come from
our vegetable patch.
We mix them to make our meal.
But did you know the rose, the marigold,
the champa and the mango
And all these plants we see
Make their own food?



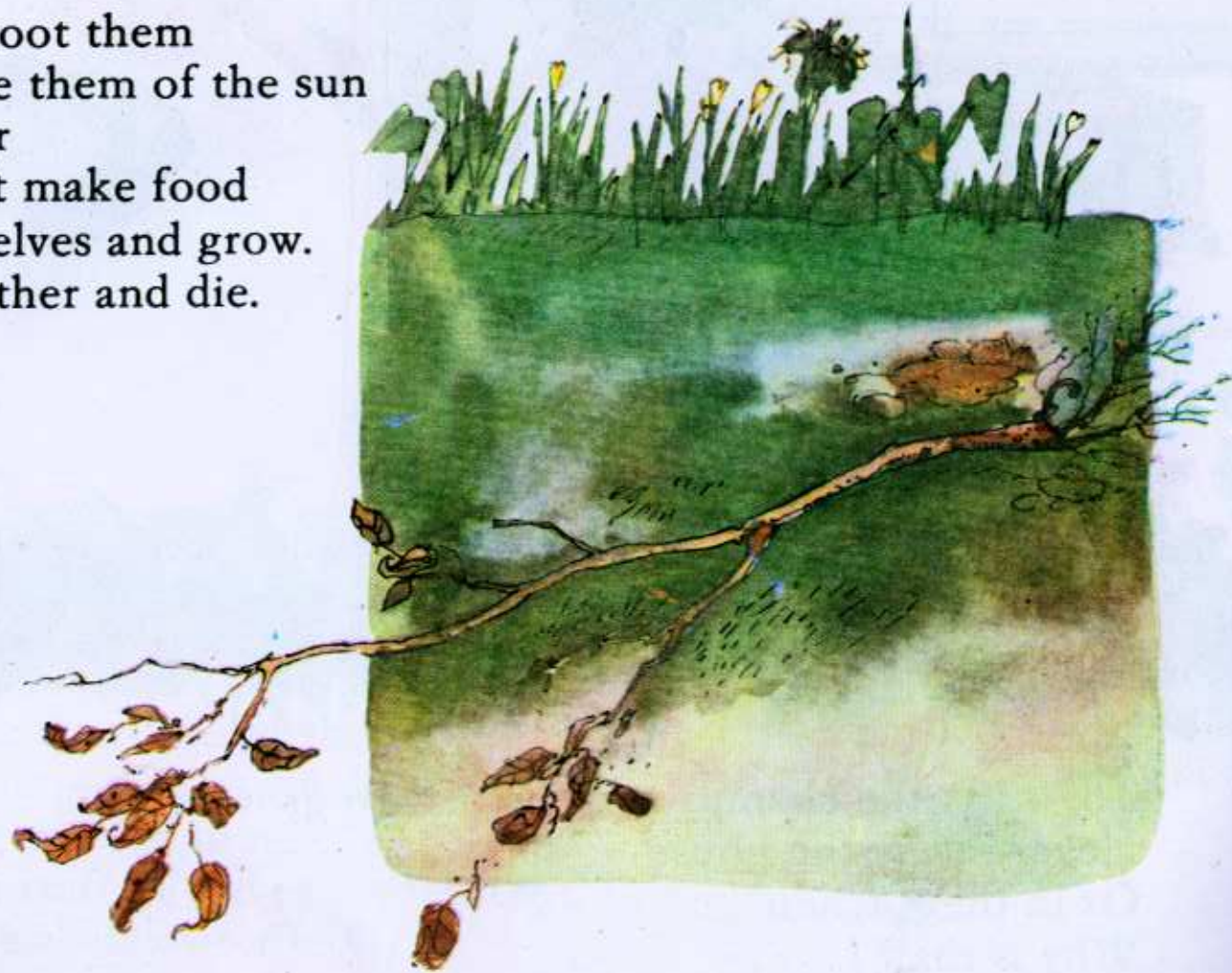


All these plants and trees
Suck water from the earth
And breathe — just as we do.
And when the sun shines
The green stuff of leaves is their diet.
They make their own food.



The rose, the champa and the mango grow outside
Never inside the house
Or in the kitchen.
Why is that?

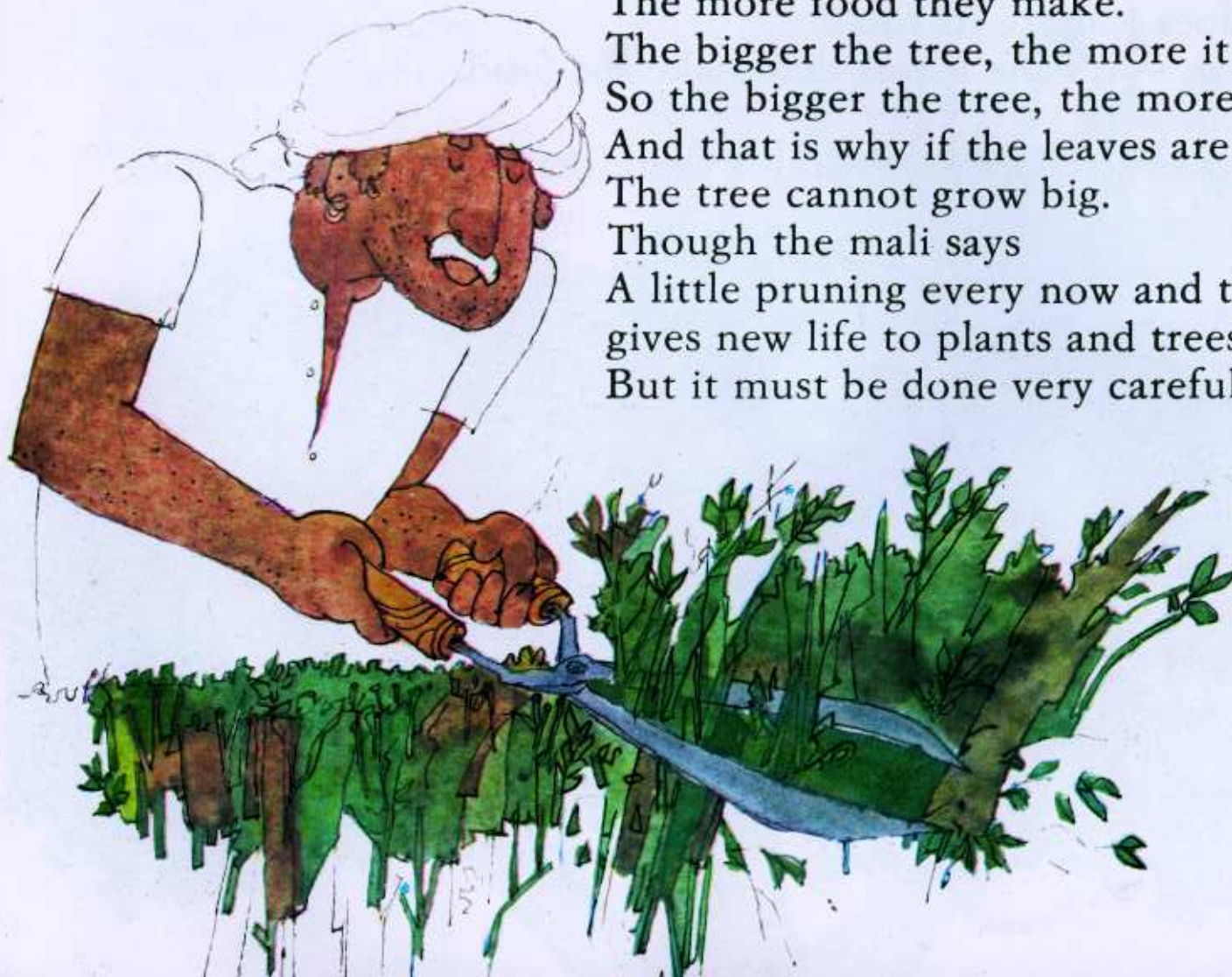
Because
If you uproot them
Or deprive them of the sun
and the air
They can't make food
for themselves and grow.
They'll wither and die.



In a large home, we cook our food in the kitchen.
The mango tree is also large
Where does it make its food?
In all trees — it's the leaves that make the food.
In all trees
Their leaves are their kitchen. It's there that their food is made.

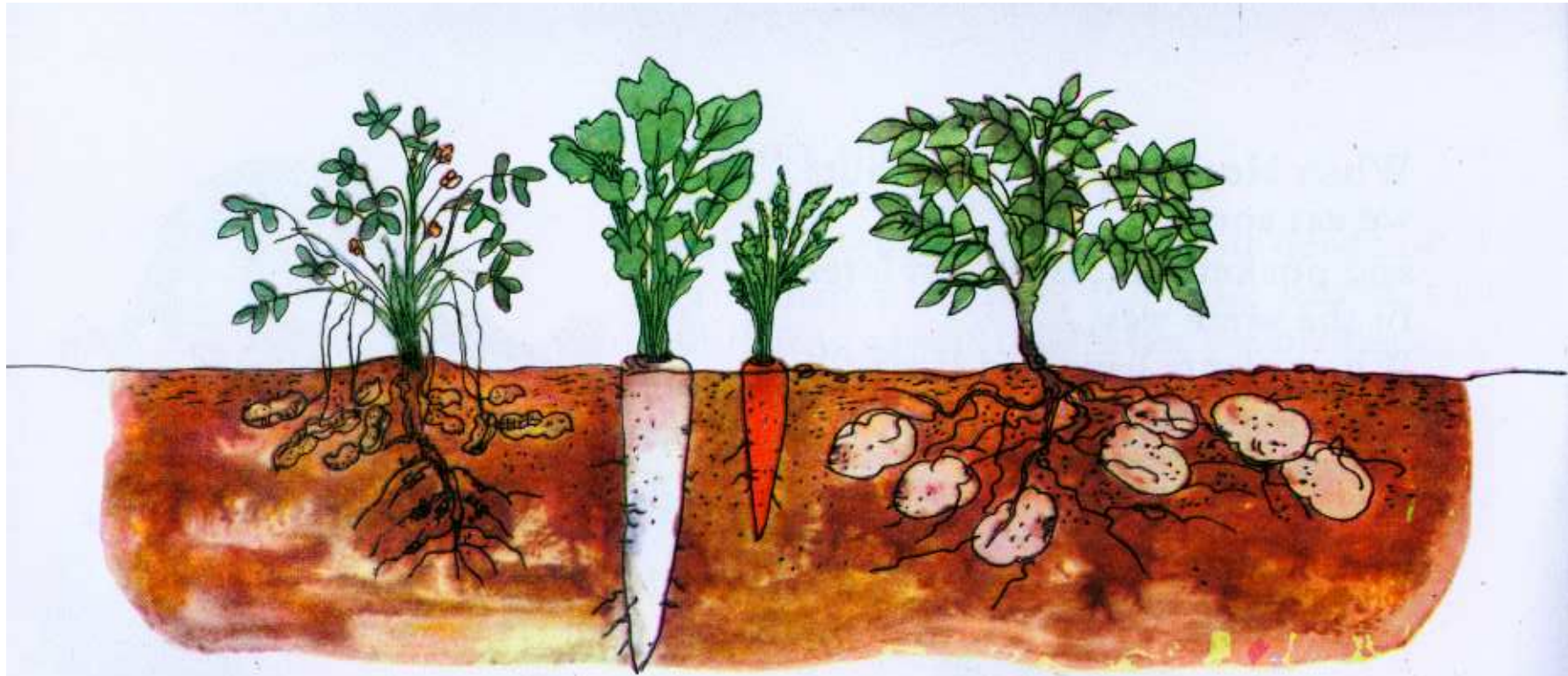


The more the leaves,
The more food they make.
The bigger the tree, the more it needs to eat.
So the bigger the tree, the more leaves it has.
And that is why if the leaves are broken
The tree cannot grow big.
Though the mali says
A little pruning every now and then
gives new life to plants and trees.
But it must be done very carefully.



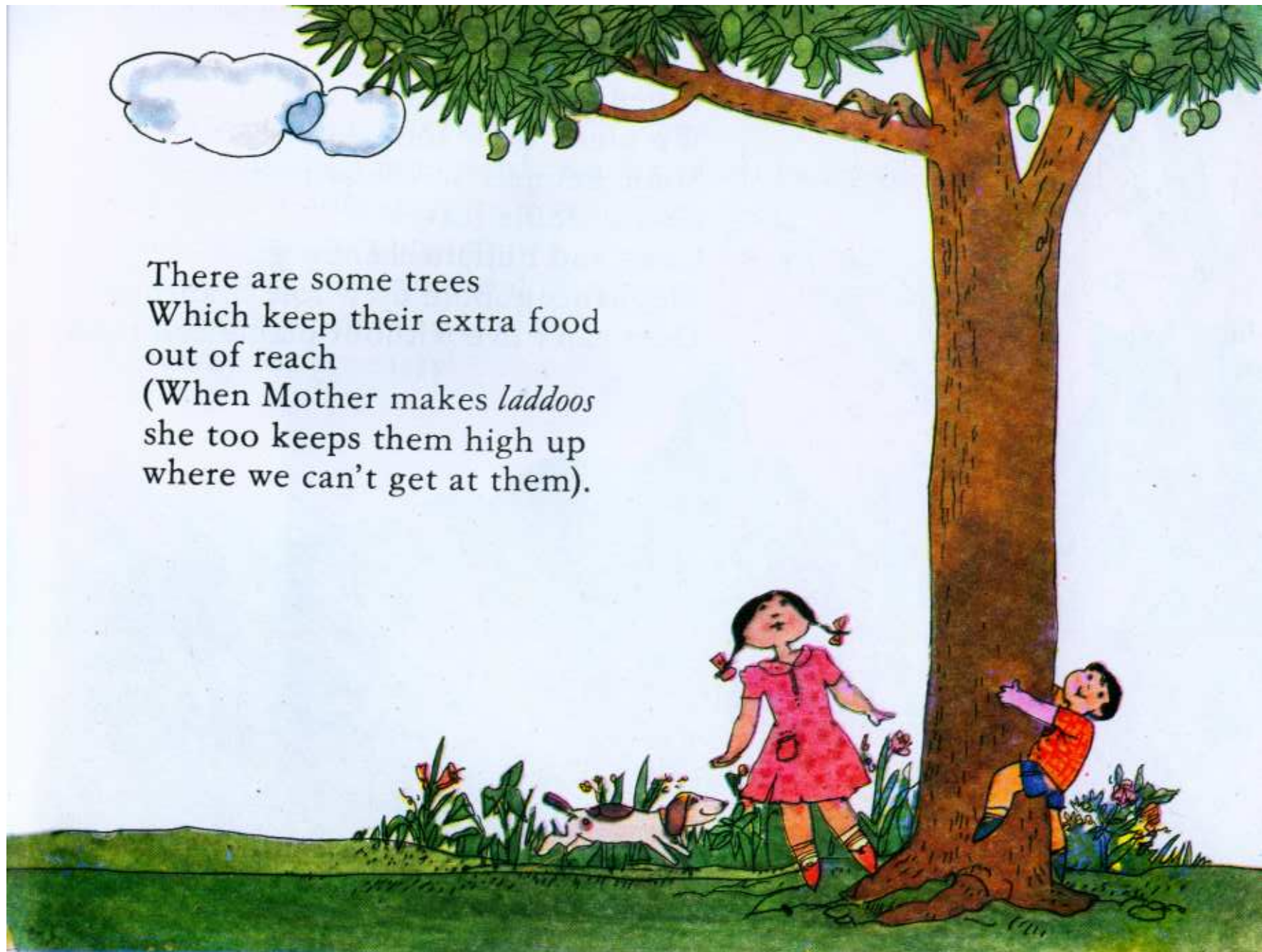
When Mother gives us peanuts
we eat some
and pocket the rest to eat later.
In the same way,
When plants have had their fill
They put away the rest
for another time.



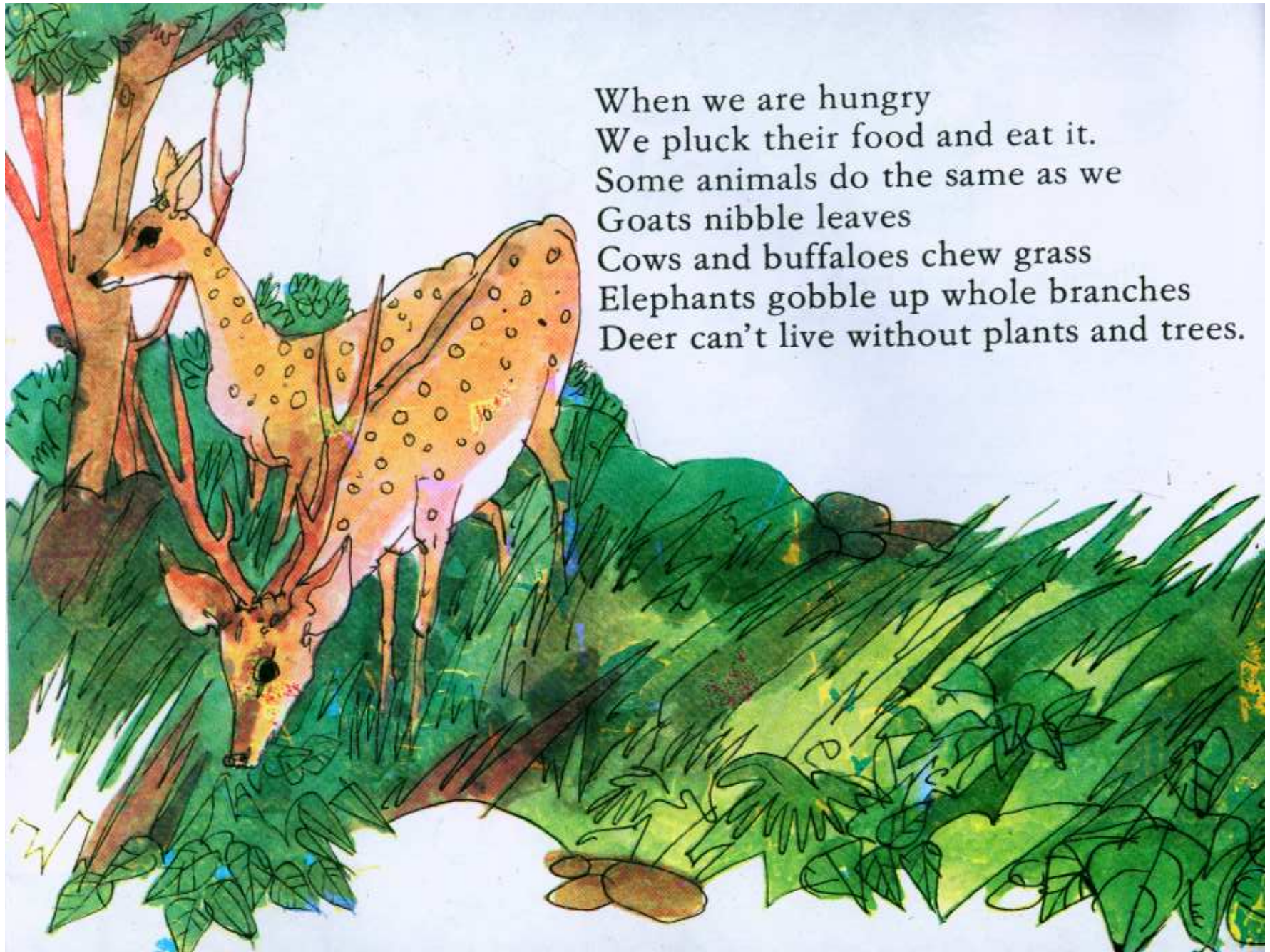


Some plants store their extra food underground.
Carrots, potatoes, peanuts do this.
(I'll let you into a secret:
Grandpa also hides his money in the safe in the same way).

There are some trees
Which keep their extra food
out of reach
(When Mother makes *laddoos*
she too keeps them high up
where we can't get at them).



When we are hungry
We pluck their food and eat it.
Some animals do the same as we
Goats nibble leaves
Cows and buffaloes chew grass
Elephants gobble up whole branches
Deer can't live without plants and trees.



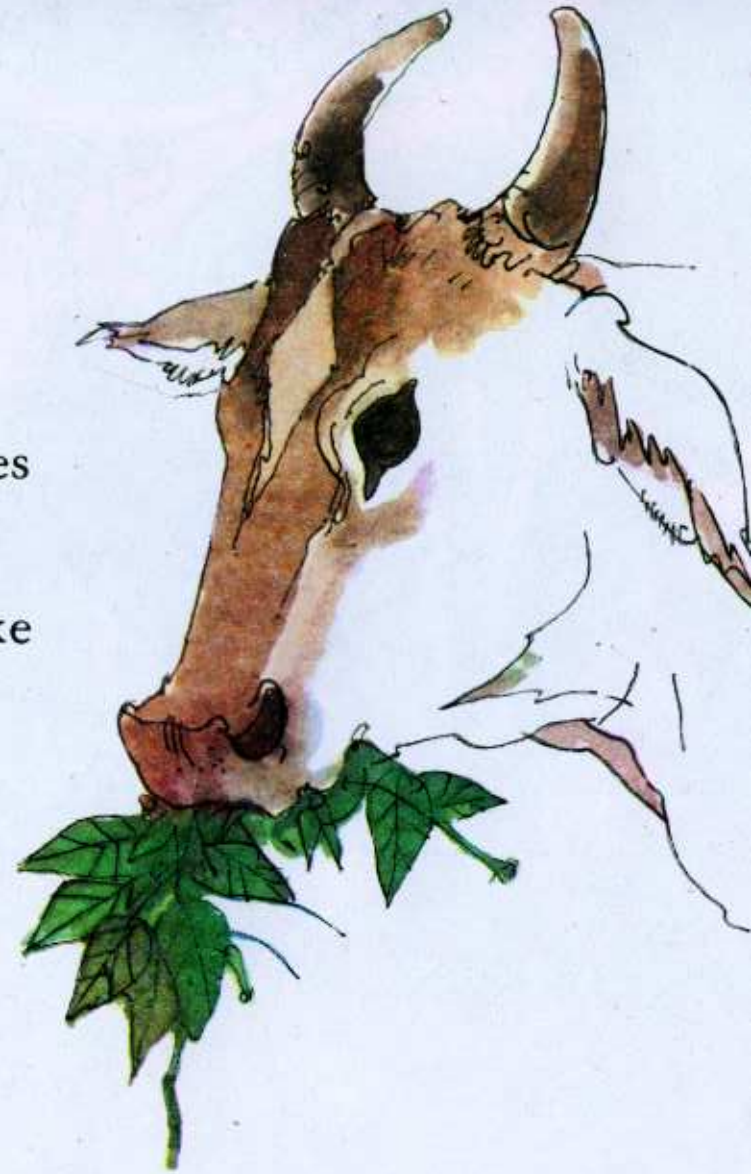
If there were no deer,
Leopards and tigers would not be able to survive.
In other words even the meateaters
need plants to remain alive.
In short our motto should be:
“Long live plants and trees!”
Hurray for greenery!





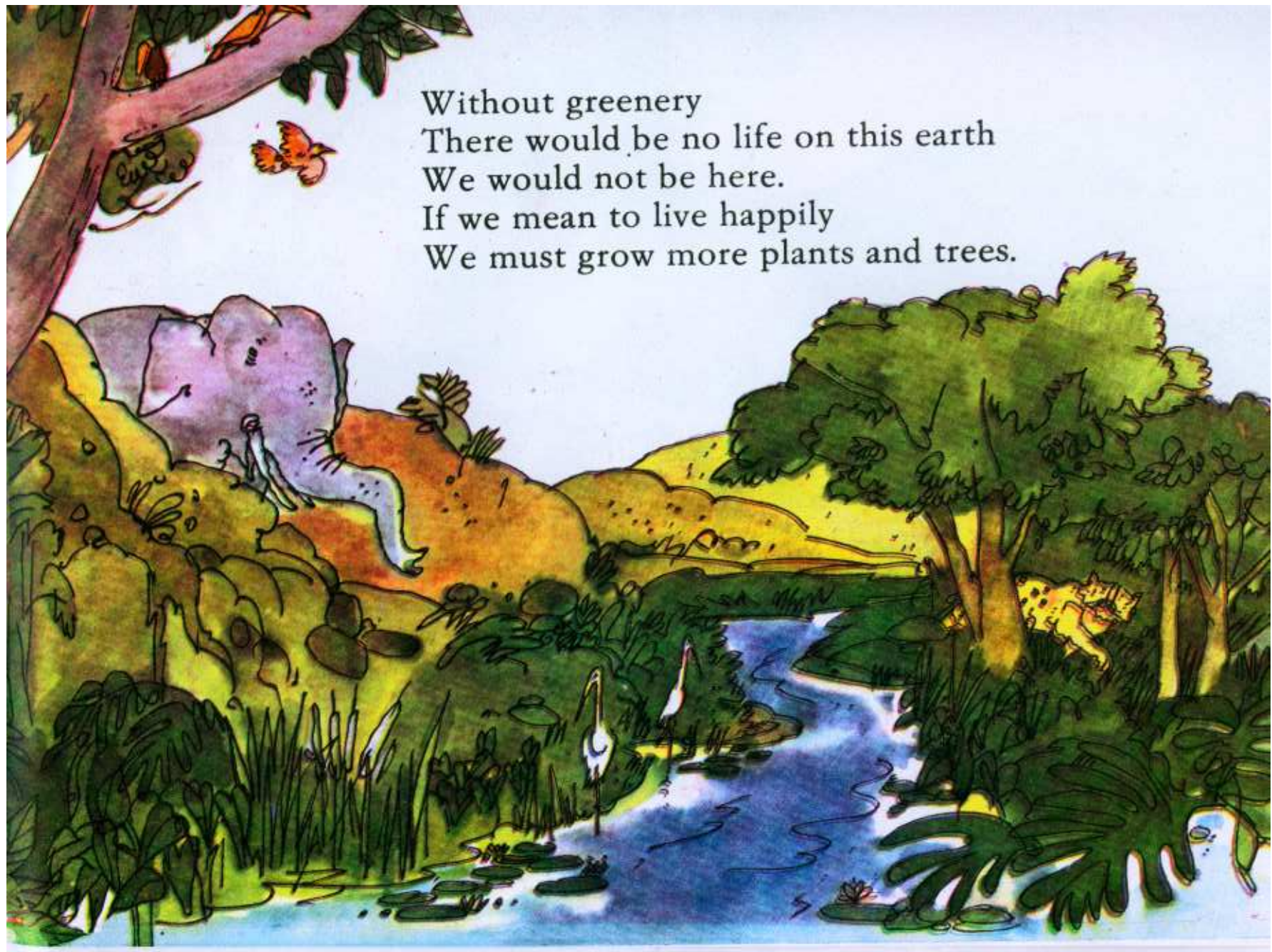
Every day we eat chapatis made from the flour of grounded wheat
But we cannot make wheat all by ourselves.
The food that the eggplant, ladyfinger, okra and marrow
make for themselves
That's the vegetable we eat.
The poor things work so hard
To make all this food
And we take it from them, cook and eat it.
Animals cannot cook
So they eat it raw.

Of the inhabitants of the earth
Only plants and trees
make their own food
From water, air and sun.
We cannot do it. Nor can animals.
The reason is simple:
We don't have the green stuff of leaves
that plants and trees have
to make their own food.
That is why what plants and trees make
We take from them to cook and eat
And animals eat it raw.





Without greenery
There would be no life on this earth
We would not be here.
If we mean to live happily
We must grow more plants and trees.






Trees and plants give us greenery
They are beautiful to look at
And what is more they give us shade.



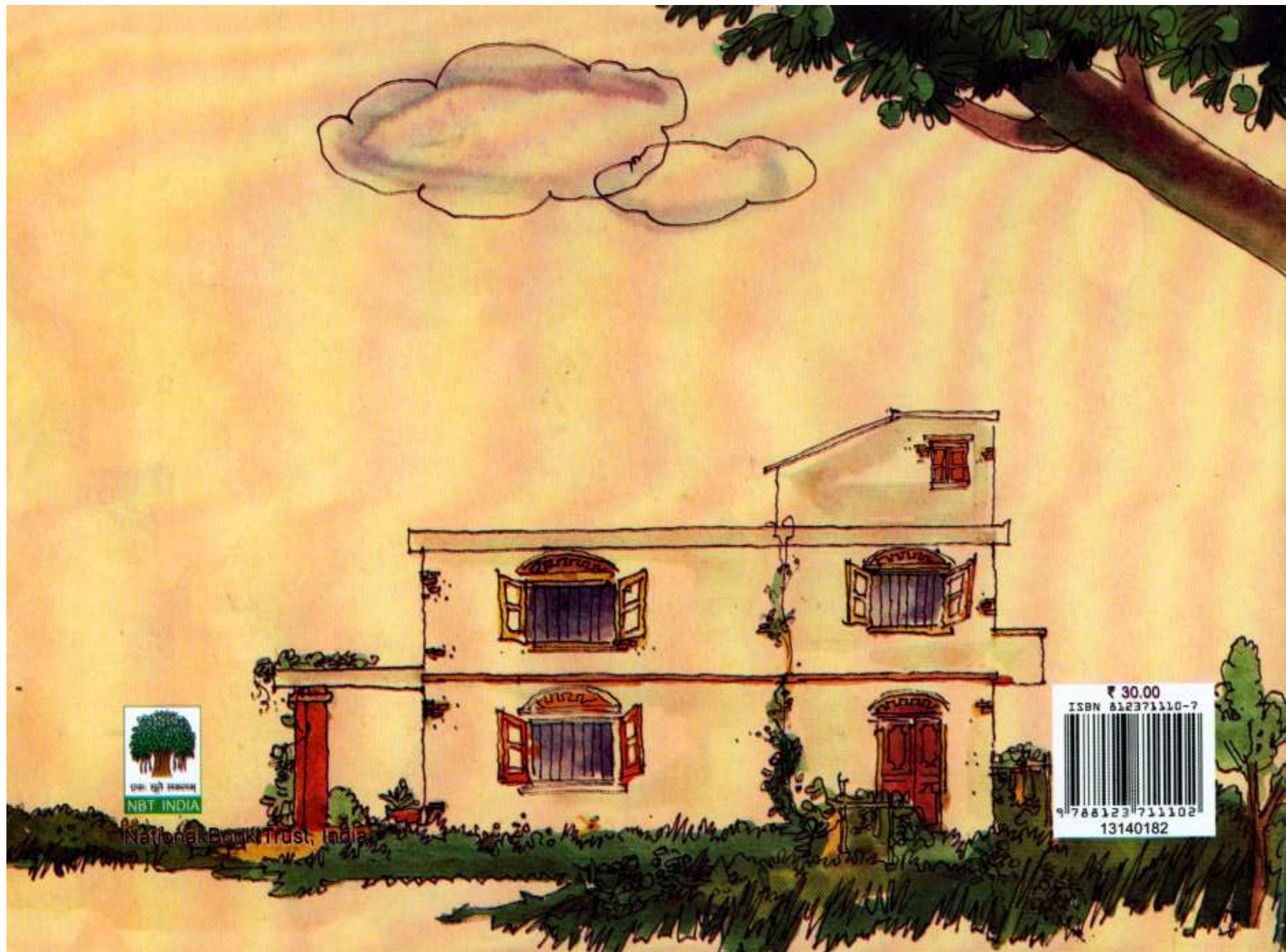
So we sow rice, wheat and corn in our fields
We plant guavas, mangoes and grapes in our gardens
And grow eggplants, ladyfingers, okra and marrow.



So let's take to our hearts
Plants and trees, big and small
They are a part of us
And we a part of them.



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